

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE
UNITARIAN CHAPEL,
MONTREAL,

ON
WEDNESDAY, 6th FEBRUARY, 1833.

BEING A DAY APPOINTED FOR
PUBLIC THANKSGIVING,

By His EXCELLENCY, the Governor-in-Chief, for deliverance
from the ravages of the Cholera.

BY CHARLES A. FARLEY.

Published by Request.

MONTREAL:
=

1833.

FARLEY, CHARLES A
Sermon. . . 1833

Canadian Pamphlet
Collection

let

SERMON.

1 Thessalonians, iii. 9.

“WHAT THANKS CAN WE RENDER TO GOD AGAIN?”

THE greatest Annual Festival of the Jewish nation is the Passover. Its observance is an acknowledgment of their gratitude to God, that when he delivered their ancestors from their hard bondage to Pharaoh, by smiting the first-born of the Egyptians with a plague, he directed his destroying angel to *pass over* the houses of the Israelites, and leave them unharmed. It has ever since been kept by them, “as a memorial” and “a feast to the Lord throughout their generations.” The celebration of this day, Christian brethren, is in some respects analogous. The destroying angel has visited these provinces; and, while he has smitten with a dreadful plague a large portion of the population, has passed over many houses in mercy. All who come up to the temple this day, acknowledge with gratitude, that he has *passed over them*, and that it is right to devote it to a particular remembrance of God’s goodness. We do not profess or imply by so doing, that gratitude is a thing for stated occasions, to be paid at once by any unusual expression of thankfulness. We should be grateful always; but we are creatures who

stand in need of forms, and stated times, and each other's countenance and encouragement, to keep our affections fresh and growing. We have a beautiful and affecting custom in our social circles, of setting apart particular days for the remembrance of absent and valued friends. We devote them to their memory, and by some marked ceremony, manifest our peculiar regard. Our friends are always dear to us, and it is for that very reason, and lest we may forget some traits in their character, and not have so lively an affection for them as we should, that we meet together and talk about them, and dwell upon their goodness. Our hearts are made better by it, and it increases the general benevolence of our character. And it is so with this day. We think, that in addition to our daily sense of God's goodness, it is meet to suspend our usual pursuits, and give one day exclusively to a remembrance of that fatherly love, which has shielded us from the pestilence, that still walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. By coming into our churches, we signify that it is not a mere social holiday ; but that we meet as a Christian people, and as brethren of one family, to ask what has been done for us, and what thanks we shall render to God again.

It is but a few months since we were called upon to set apart a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer, that God would be pleased to stay the pestilence that was then walking in darkness, through Europe and Asia. Now, that the evil has passed by us, and we are mercifully permitted by Almighty God to join with the survivors of this calamity, in offering our thanksgivings for his sparing mercy, both consistency and piety suggest to us our subject; and I shall consider some of the circumstances which call for our gratitude, and the manner in which it should be expressed.

There has been something so dreadful in the character and progress of this pestilence, that our thoughts have been almost entirely taken from the kindness, with which it has been ac-

companied. It has thrown nation after nation into mourning. For more than fourteen years, this invisible messenger of death has been walking in darkness through the earth, and slaying its thousands and tens of thousands. It has walked too in silence, and at all hours, and has done its work with but too sudden and certain rapidity. Its touch has thrown down the strong and the active ; it has seized the infant in its innocence ; it has stopped the young in all their frolic glee, and their sanguine fearlessness. It has arrested the man of business on the wharf, in the street, and in his counting-room ; and the man of pleasure in his dissipation. It has also violently interrupted the peaceful decline of the aged. Climate has had no perceptible influence. It has walked through the sands of the desert. It has climbed the mountains, gone down into the depths of the valleys, and traversed the wide ocean. The coldest and the hottest, the driest and the dampest places, have all been visited. But is there no relief to the picture ? Do we see nothing in it but desolation, and have we nothing else to do, but to bewail its ravages ? Not so. It follows the same law with the other afflictions of this life, which are always attended with circumstances of mercy, and in which we always see a preponderance of good.

I. The first circumstance for which we have reason to be grateful, is the manner in which the disease has made its advances in the world. It did not come upon mankind like an earthquake, or the eruption of a volcano, and in a moment swallow up its thousands, without allowing an instant's preparation to guard against its attacks, and give the soul time to collect itself before it meets its God. It began its march slowly, and traversed, first a city, then a province, and then a country. It first took away one or two, and then the number of its victims gradually increased. Christian nations have been the last to be attacked ; and though the lives of the heathen are equally precious in the sight of God, yet the responsibility of Christians is far higher. They have received

more light ; they have had an express revelation from the Son of God, by which to walk, and a heaven and an eternal life continually before them. Of course, death is to them a far more solemn thing, and they ought to bless God for every warning he gives them, and every moment he spares them to make preparation. Here, then, we have great reason to be thankful. We have been saved the misery of having this calamity burst upon us without notice. Before the finger of God had touched us, this pestilence had been for years raging in the old world, and we had reason to think it might one day visit us. We had, therefore, time to set our house in order and make some preparation for its reception ; to reflect as Christians calmly upon this providence ; to meditate upon the character of that Being, who in all his operations consults our real happiness, and does "not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men," and thus to fortify our minds with religious trust, and be ready to bear whatever our heavenly Father might inflict, whether upon our own persons, or the persons of our friends. The human mind is so constituted by its benevolent Creator, that though when affliction is sudden and unexpected, it sometimes loses its balance, yet when it can have time to reflect, it assumes an entirely different character, and clothes itself in the panoply of unshaken fortitude. Regarding this pestilence, therefore, merely in a temporal light, we have great reason to be thankful. It had not broken out in different countries, nor in every place of the same country at the same moment ; but, travelled slowly from place to place, and thus permitted all who chose, to seek a purer atmosphere, and to avoid the sight of misery, which they were unable, from their situation or their fears, to alleviate. Meantime the character of the disease has been studied, and many valuable lives saved, by salutary precautions, and by arresting the disease at an early stage. When, therefore, it reached these provinces, though it came to many unexpectedly, and to all more suddenly and fiercely than was

anticipated, yet the distress was probably nothing to what it would have been, had it made its first appearance in the world, in Canada. The people knew what precautions to take, what remedies to use. They had time to collect themselves, and make some provision for the sufferers, who otherwise might have been left to die alone, and by neglect.

II. Another circumstance demanding peculiar gratitude, is the season of the year in which it came, and the comparatively short duration of the disease in any one place. It appeared among us in summer, and hence has greatly diminished the suffering of the poor ; for, though business was interrupted, and many were thrown out of employ, yet it was easier to find employment then than at any other season of the year. The facilities of travelling were greater, food and convenient resting places were more easily procured, and clothing would answer then, which would be entirely unfit for either the spring or the winter. But suppose that this pestilence had come in winter, and the poor had been left unassisted and with large families, in which there were helpless children and many infirm through age and sickness, to contend with hunger and cold and nakedness—to wander, as they have been seen to do, through our villages in large companies, shunned as they passed, as the most dreaded objects of contagion, and with reluctance permitted to occupy the most miserable shelter. It is impossible adequately to conceive of the wretchedness they would have suffered, and especially the emigrants, with which our cities have swarmed—many of whom came over to this country, miserably provided with the most common conveniences of life. Within the last year, nearly 50,000 emigrants have landed in Quebec. Many of these have already had their hopes cruelly frustrated, and their purposes broken off. They left the place of their birth, (and it was still dear to them, though many of them fled from misery,) and found a pestilence, which seemed to single them out for its ravages, and a grave in the stranger land : ” but, had this

pestilence broken out in winter, they must have been starved and frozen by crowds, in the winter snows. Although the emigrants arrive in a mild season, yet, being many of them poor, a long time is required to procure a comfortable settlement. Large families are crowded together, scantily fed and clothed—often breathing an impure atmosphere. During the prevalence of the cholera, they were seen encamped on the wharves, and in the open fields. In winter, this would have been impracticable; and, coming as they do from a milder climate, they must, under the most favorable circumstances, suffer from the rigor of a Canadian winter. Even allowing that they had remained in our cities, we know, that notwithstanding the provisions made by the benevolent, our poor always suffer greatly in the winter; but it is nothing to what they would have suffered in the midst of a general panic.

III. Another cause for thankfulness is the evident discrimination, that has been made in the victims of this pestilence. It seems to have followed the same law which we see every day producing suffering; the law, for instance, that man must suffer the punishment of his imprudence and his sins. If a man neglects the care of his health, through thoughtlessness or wilful excess, he is punished by the loss of it. Now we fully agree with the remark that has been made, that had there not been intemperance in the world, there would not have been this pestilence. It has taken away, indeed, some individuals of the utmost purity of life, whose loss has been severely felt in the community, and who were among its richest ornaments, and its richest blessings; but these have been very few, and of this number, some, perhaps, neglected those precautions, which are required of all, under such circumstances. Generally speaking, it has spared the virtuous, and punished the vicious—sweeping away those whose lives were burdens to themselves and to others.—The pestilence has walked among the dissolute with fearful destruction. Almost by a touch, it has destroyed those whose constitutions were

broken down by a life of sin. Now the moral effect which this was evidently intended to produce ought to be great, and it is these moral teachings for which we have most reason to be thankful. It was evidently intended to operate as a check upon the dissolute, and to show the madness of pursuing their course of life. The usual order of things teaches this, it is true. It always has been the case, that criminal excess is followed by inevitable ruin; but then the usual order of things is quiet and gradual: few men attend to it, and still fewer are warned by it, till destruction comes upon them, like an armed man, or a thief in the night. It is extremely difficult to persuade persons who are forming bad habits, that they are doing themselves harm. The gradual decay of their faculties, they do not perceive, and they attribute it to a thousand other circumstances, besides the true one. When, therefore, death approaches the intemperate man by degrees, and faculty after faculty loses its vitality, there is nothing very alarming to the dying victim, or to him who is ready to follow his example; for it steals upon him in the insidious form of a slow consumption. Besides, when the consequences come thus slowly, individuals are taken away, without its attracting any more attention than any other death. The example is not a public one; it is not seen or felt in all its reality. If it occurs in high society, pains are taken to hush the matter up, and keep it concealed. But in this calamity, there can be no concealment. When the pestilence passes by the houses of the temperate, the industrious, and pure, and goes into the houses of the dissolute, and cuts down with indiscriminate mercilessness, the young and old of both sexes, and turns whole streets into lamentation and mourning, then the awful warning is heeded, and men cannot help seeing the cause, and flying from the haunts of death and infamy. More than this,—there are men who have seldom been within a church, are unable to read the Bible, or have scorned to read it, whose Sundays have been spent at the card-table,

or the tavern, who have had no friend to warn them, or have refused all warning ; and they would have gone on so to their graves, but for this solemn preacher. Here are lessons they can read—and must read. Here is a voice they can hear—and must hear. Here are consequences which are demonstrated with irresistible conviction to their senses. There are some beings who must be operated upon at first, in this gross way, and when fear has done its work, and the attention is aroused, they may afterwards be induced to listen to the language of love.

My friends, the punishment has been dreadful ! but it is not to be compared with the misery that is entailed upon whole families by unchecked habits of intemperance. There are those who every year have to eat the bread and drink the cup of bitterness, owing to the horrible excesses of perhaps only one member of their household ; and it will be an unspeakable blessing if this visitation gives a serious check to the spread of intemperance.

Nor is the warning confined to the lowest and most dissolute. This pestilence has respected neither wealth nor rank—it has told the man of pleasure to give up his dissipation—it has told every man whose habits do not bring upon him the scorn of the world, and are not disgusting by their excess, yet are far from good, far from moderate, or decent, that they are dangerous, and must be abandoned ; and when they have slighted the still words of the Bible, the affectionate advice of friends, the addresses of Temperance Societies, the lessons of experience, and the instructions of the pulpit, they perhaps have listened to the voice of this instructor. Its admonitions have gone with the voice of a trumpet through every heart in the country, teaching the great lessons of self-respect and the formation of good habits.

IV. There is another advantage resulting from this calamity. It has called out the compassionate feelings of the community, and done much to cherish the affections. It is well,

sometimes, that our worldly pursuits are interrupted. Their tendency is to make us selfish and insensible to the finer feelings of our nature.—With many, the pursuits of trade, which were commenced to get a reputable support for one's self, or family, and to stand well with the community, grow into a love of accumulation, a love of money for its own sake, or else to outvie our neighbors, or to live luxuriously; and even if it does not go so far as that, the every day pursuits of business have a tendency to blunt the feelings and render us indifferent to their cultivation. But when a pestilence like this comes among those whom we love, then the most callous heart is moved; the sufferings of the invalid, his gratitude for the attentions shown him, the very exercise of these attentions, and the thousand trying circumstances of the sick chamber, awaken the sensibilities of men, who might otherwise have gone on through life regardless of nothing but their own interests,—admiring benevolence, perhaps, but never feeling nor practising it. Let me add, too, that such a calamity brings before the eyes of the whole community the most shining examples of Christian philanthropy, and Christian endurance and resignation. The hollow professions of nominal Christians are now detected, their loud talking, and boasting, and ostentatious zeal, are stripped of their falsity, and their hearts are found not to be so tender, nor their courage so great, nor their principles so firm, as they pretended. They are shaking with terror, or flying in dismay. They are seen leaving the sick and the dying, to whom before they had recommended religion as a security against every thing; but, they are the first to forget its power and its consolations. We now learn that a man who has not perhaps a correct speculative faith, may yet be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Indulge me a moment longer. I have said nothing of our deliverance from this pestilence. Its departure from so many of our towns and cities, though a great cause for thank-

fulness, is, I cannot help thinking, among the least. If it teaches us to live more devotedly to God, then we cannot be too thankful; but if not, we had better have suffered even more than we have, and profited by the lesson. The question comes home to us now, How are we to show our thankfulness? The answer is, *By the increased holiness of our lives.* Such a providence cannot be neglected with impunity. There is nothing fortuitous in this calamity, no more so than in any other. If sickness is really intended as a discipline of the character, then if the invalid rises from his bed without being a better man, he will be held more deeply responsible; and if these provinces do not become better by this calamity, then we only lay up for ourselves "wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." We all need these lessons. The best are apt, by the regular return of God's blessings, to think little of the gift of health, and the supply of our numberless wants. We are apt, by the regular return of our stated seasons of worship, to be formal and cold, and engage in them as mere matters of course. Every slight interruption of the health, every severe illness, every opening grave, ought to speak to us, and we ought to listen. But we do not listen; and it will be well if we listen now.

When we are smitten with disease, or trouble of any kind, how earnestly we pray for deliverance, and what good resolutions we make; but when the deliverance comes, we are too apt to go on as before. We think of God when he afflicts—we forget him when he blesses us. When our Saviour was upon earth, men came to him with dreadful diseases, and besought him to cure them, but the moment they were restored to health, they left him without even an acknowledgment. Of this we have a striking instance in the chapter which I read this morning, (Luke xvii. 11—19.) Leprosy was one of the most horrible diseases that ever afflicted human nature. It stole upon its victim very slowly.—The

color fled, the body became covered with scales, till at last the limbs mortified, and fell apart. Among the Jews, this disorder was regarded with peculiar abhorrence. By their law, the leper was termed *unclean*. The unhappy sufferer was forbidden all intercourse with his brethren; he was excluded from the worship of the temple and synagogue; he was obliged to dwell apart from the abodes of men; his very touch was pollution, and if any approached him, he was obliged to warn them, with the cry, *unclean! unclean!!* Ten of these men came to Jesus, and were instantly cured; but no sooner were they restored, than they left their benefactor without even an acknowledgment: at last, one, struck perhaps with remorse, turned back and thanked him, "and he was a Samaritan."

One would think it almost incredible, that men, who were thus relieved from such a dreadful disorder, should forget even to thank their benefactor; that they who were restored in a moment, and by a word, to perfect health, to the embraces of their friends, the society of men, and the enjoyment of life, which was before hateful, should forget "to give glory to God." There is something most affecting in our Saviour's question and answer. "Were there not ten cleansed; but where are the nine? there are not found, that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger!"

But, my friends, these men were not wonderful exceptions to their race. In all ages they have been seen. In this advanced age of Christianity, there is ingratitude, if not so striking, yet just as criminal, nay, even more so. There is some apology for these men, which Christians of the present day have not. The state of the world was then exceedingly corrupt, the character of Jesus was not understood by any perfectly, and his claims, as the Son of God, by few. Men were believers in the powers of magic, and of evil spirits, and they might have ascribed their cure to the Prince of Demons. We have no such refuge. We profess to see the

finger of God, in all our blessings and afflictions—and if so, to slight the teachings of this pestilence, is to slight God himself. We trust this will not be the case with these provinces. In very few places has this pestilence raged with more severity; and it will be unnatural as well as unchristian, if the people give themselves up as eagerly as ever to worldliness and dissipation.

Christian brethren—this day of thanksgiving should be one of sober joy. It can hardly help exciting the most serious reflections. This city has but just put on sackcloth for this heavy affliction.—Within a short distance from us are the crowded and newly-made graves of the sufferers. We are surrounded by those whose tears are yet flowing for the loss of their friends. There are mothers, weeping for their children, and will not be comforted because they are not. There are children, who are left without father or mother. There are those who, like David, are lamenting the loss of friends whom they loved as their own souls; and many are standing apart in silence, the solitary survivors of perhaps a large family. This is not the time for “the voice of singing men, and singing women.” Let us keep the day holy unto the Lord. While the heart of some swells with a richer and a larger love, at the reflection that this calamity has not touched one of their glad circle, let them remember with sympathy, that they are in the immediate neighborhood of many an aching bosom—that there are hearts too heavy to rejoice with them, and that many a vacant seat is seen this day at the family table. Let us be sober: let us live less for earth, and more for heaven, that we may be ready at any moment to give up our account with joy and not with grief.—Let us lift up our hearts in gratitude to God, who has given us “the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

,
l
-
n
-
e
s
s
e
s
-
e
s
s
-
e
a
-
n
e
e
t
s
e
e

